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Collateral

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COLLATERAL

*Johnny Perez**

Would you believe me if I told you,

That I was arrested two days after my first born . . . was born?
Thirteen years later I'm told that I served my time.

But the truth is . . . I'm surrounded by an visible fence

See, my life hasn't been the same since . . . I was sentenced . . .
Incarceration's collateral consequence.

Con Sequence

Con as in "Convict"

As in convict him, and then evict him, and soon he too . . . will feel
like the victim . . .

Oh Wait, I wasn't supposed to go there right?

I mean, there was a time when I fantasized that my release would be
televised

That it would be screened on the screens of Times Square, or
anywhere else for that matter

That it would come to you from the lips of Barbara Walters

In between commercials of five-dollar Foot longs and Black
Man Reelections

But it didn't quite happen that way

* Director of U.S. Prison Programs for the National Religious Campaign Against Torture. I would like to thank Cara Benson for helping me find my poetic voice during my incarceration. I would also like to thank Sean Dalpiaz, Sheray Williams, Richard Brown, and Dee (Buffalo) Anderson for supporting and challenging me to be bold with my pen. Lastly, I would like to thank Sheenese Chambers for investing in my leadership and believing in me when it was difficult for me to believe in myself. I could not have asked for a better life partner.

And after 13 years of living inside of a human cage
all I had was \$34.65
A Pocket . . . full of confidence,
A picture of my little girl's pretty brown eyes,

And memories that till this day, I pray to god to help me forget.
Memories of sounds I hope I never have to hear again.

Like the sound of eternal silence . . . SHHHHHHHHH
When you are placed inside of a Space the same size as your arms
outstretched.
Like the sounds of endless cries from the batons of the same
people that were sworn to protect you.
The same people who love to point their fingers, but can't seem to
pull their thumbs.

And I'm sorry, but I refuse to apologize if my confidence is your
insecurity.
I refuse to ask the elephant in the room to move its feet so that you
can walk by.

— — —

I refuse to modify, alter, water-down, remodel, or otherwise Revise
the man I have become, not because of prison, but despite Prison
And in spite of what you say,
Today, Mass incarceration . . . stems from a larger system of racist
oppression, intentionally created to **KILL ME**, and KILL people who
look like me, talk like . . . have the same Skin Color as me . . .

Oh Wait, I wasn't supposed to go there neither, was I?

Well guess what?
It's real easy for you to judge the reaction to my poverty and
oppression,
From the seat and comfort of your own privilege.

And I confess to breaking the law, but would you believe me

Would you believe me If I told you
I didn't learn how to pull a gun on you
Until someone pulled a gun on me?

Hurt people really do hurt people

Yeah, I said it, I know I can sometimes be unapologetic.
But that's my way of masking the hurt

See, it hurts when you are labeled a pariah, ostracized, and politically
circumcised . . . by circumstances that existed long before you were
pushed into existence.

And I'm sorry I can't hear your "All lives matter" Rhetoric
Cause I'm too busy wiping your boot prints off my daughter's
pictures.
And I'm only 38, But I can't seem to remember a time when
America was ever great,
And meanwhile . . . the guy with the ugly red hat
Has lined his political pools with those who Made-off with
Johnny Appleseed's Mortgage . . . and you call me a criminal?

Oh Wait, I wasn't supposed to go there, was I?
But we live and we learn, right?

We learn just like Viktor Frankl learned in a Man's Search for
Meaning

That you and only you
Are the Alchemist of your own emotions
That you and only you
Are the Author of the next chapter of the book of your life.

And if you're lucky,
I mean only if you're really lucky
And your name is not

Sandra Bland or
Trayvon Martin or
Oscar Grant or
Sean Bell or
Samuel Hurrell or
Tamir Rice or
Michael Brown or
Eric Gardner or
Kalief Browder OR

The countless men, women, and children
Who have been reincarnated as hashtags on my Instagram feed.

NO, If you're really lucky You just might live long
enough to write a poem about it!